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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3749

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 000718

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL RP

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE FOREIGN SECRETARY DISCUSSES ASEAN,
BILATERAL EXERCISES WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: MANILA 610 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging conversation with Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, Ambassador discussed upcoming military exercises, ASEAN, high-profile extraditions, the ongoing case of U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, and the ICRC hostage situation (septel). Romulo welcomed upcoming bilateral and multilateral humanitarian military exercises, and expressed confidence that ASEAN meetings to be held soon in Thailand might help mitigate the effects of the global financial crisis in Southeast Asia. He underscored Philippine eagerness to extradite three Philippine former policemen implicated in a widely publicized 2000 murder case, and agreed with the Ambassador's view that a rapid resolution of the longrunning case of a U.S. Marine convicted in a controversial rape case is important. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) The Foreign Secretary first focused on upcoming bilateral and multilateral humanitarian exercises. Referring to the 25th annual Balikatan exercise set to begin April 16 in the Bicol region and northern Luzon, he expressed his hopes that everything was in readiness, and that a carefully planned liberty policy was in place to proactively head off any untoward incidents. Romulo welcomed the May 4-8 ASEAN Regional Forum Voluntary Demonstration Response (ARF-VDR), which the Ambassador outlined in more detail, offering assurances that the Embassy was fully engaged with a Philippine interagency team to ensure that all preparations were in order.

ASEAN FOCUS ON FINANCE

¶3. (C) Turning to the subject of upcoming ASEAN meetings in Thailand, the Foreign Secretary outlined his plans to accompany Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to the mid-April meetings, while lamenting ASEAN's lack of sensitivity to its sole Christian-majority member in scheduling the meetings during Holy Week -- including Easter Sunday itself. Romulo related that he was closely following developments in G-20 meetings in UK, and expressed hopes that plans will move ahead for a proposed \$120 billion ASEAN equity fund, which member states will be able to draw on in order to address liquidity problems brought on by the global financial crisis. He reiterated that the Philippines would welcome the presence of Secretary Clinton at a meeting to be held in July for ASEAN foreign ministers, and said he hoped the Secretary could visit Manila before or after the meetings in Thailand.

DELAYED JUSTICE

¶4. (C) The Ambassador emphasized the need for expeditious action by the Appeals Court in the case of Lance Corporal Daniel J. Smith, both in light of his accuser's affidavit

questioning events the night of the incident (reftel) and given that the Visiting Forces Agreement guarantees U.S. personnel a prompt and speedy trial. Ambassador further observed that the Philippine Constitution itself provides that appeals court cases must be resolved within 12 months, and Smith's case had been pending for over 17 months. The Foreign Secretary concurred with the Ambassador's points, noting that the time was at hand for this longstanding and awkward issue to be resolved -- now even more so in the wake of the victim's "clarification" of testimony that had led to Smith's conviction. He said that the Arroyo administration understood the importance of resolving the case quickly and offered that key government officials were actively engaged in that pursuit.

PLUGGING LEAKS ON EXTRADITION LOGISTICS

¶5. (C) Romulo expressed his government's eagerness to carry through with the extraditions of Glenn Dumlao, Cezar Mancao, and Michael Ray Aquino, three former policemen implicated in the high-profile 2000 murder of a public relations executive and his driver. The Ambassador took the opportunity to comment that leaks by the Philippine Department of Justice regarding the extradition subjects' travel itineraries and other sensitive details were at the least unhelpful, and could not only imperil progress on the cases in question, but even jeopardize other bilateral judicial cooperation.

KENNEY